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DEPT PASS TO INL

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TAGS: PREF PREL PTER KPAL LE
SUBJECT: INL A/S JOHNSON PLEDGES SUPPORT FOR ISF REFORM

REF: BEIRUT 113

Classified By: Ambassador Michelle Sison for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: INL Assistant Secretary David Johnson assured MGen Rifi, the head of Lebanon's Internal Security Forces (ISF), of continued U.S. support to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the Lebanese police so they can exercise their authority in all of Lebanon. Gen. Rifi acknowledged improvements in this regard but insisted that security cooperation with the U.S. in fighting terrorists also be a factor in gauging success of U.S. assistance to the ISF. A/S Johnson met with UN officials, who raised concerns that the INL plans to build an ISF police station in the Nahr al-Barid Palestinian camp remains a risky venture unless Lebanese government dialogue with the local community addresses widespread misconceptions and expectations about government intentions to police Palestinian camps using community policing techniques. Deputy UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Jack Christofides outlined to A/S Johnson a common donor position on border control that was presented to Prime Minister Hariri on February 2 (septel). The common donor position seeks a show of greater urgency on the part of the Lebanese government in securing its borders -- a key requirement of UNSCR 1701 -- through the appointment of a senior level "border czar" to oversee the development of a comprehensive border plan and its implementation. End Summary.

ISF IMPROVED BUT STILL NEEDS HELP

¶2. (U) The visiting A/S Johnson and the Ambassador participated in the January 11 graduation of three ISF training classes -- 286 cadets who graduated from the 12th and 13th iteration of the Basic Cadet Course and 21 lieutenants who completed an extensive train-the-trainers course in community policing. Following the graduation ceremony, A/S Johnson and the Ambassador joined the ISF Director General, MGen Ashraf Rifi, in reviewing progress in the INL-funded refurbishment of the ISF Training Academy. They then participated in a briefing for the ISF general staff on community policing presented by two newly minted ISF community policing trainers.

¶3. (C) At a subsequent meeting, Rifi told A/S Johnson that while some groups are still opposed to ISF policing (Note: an apparent reference to Hizballah and the Palestinians. End note.), the situation is improving. Hizballah is now asking for ISF assistance in fighting crime in South Beirut, Rifi said, and cooperated with the ISF in the "100% eradication" of hashish in the Bekaa Valley. He thanked the USG for its

support to the ISF, citing the extensive INL training and equipping programs. U.S. assistance is being well spent, he assured Johnson, and the 480 patrol vehicles on Lebanon's streets are a visible sign of American support. The recent emphasis on community policing training, developed primarily for the Nahr Al-Barid Palestinian refugee camp, has convinced the ISF of the merits of the approach. Community policing will be implemented in the entire ISF, Rifi asserted. Command, control and communications deficiencies remain critical and the ISF is looking forward to USG assistance in this realm. Give us more help to fight terrorism, crime, and narcotics, he continued.

¶14. (C) A/S Johnson commended the partnership between the ISF and the USG and assured Rifi of continued U.S. support to help expand the ISF presence into areas previously closed to Lebanese security agencies. The ISF is demonstrating this partnership in sharing some of the cost of the Training Academy refurbishment, and excellent maintenance of INL provided equipment. Johnson pledged to help build the communications system. The Ambassador also highlighted the importance of the ISF in strategic security cooperation, an issue of great importance to PM Hariri and President Sleiman.

ISF POLICING IN CAMPS STILL A HIGH RISK VENTURE

¶15. (C) A/S Johnson and the Ambassador met with Deputy UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Jack Christofides and ambassadors from key donor countries (the UK, EU, Germany and Denmark) to discuss possible U.S. assistance in securing the borders of Lebanon. Christofides outlined to A/S Johnson a common donor position on border control that was presented to Prime Minister Hariri on February 2 (septel). The common donor position seeks a show of greater urgency on the part of the Lebanese government in securing its borders -- a key requirement of UNSCR 1701 -- through the appointment of a senior level "border czar" to oversee the development of a comprehensive border plan and its implementation. Later on January 11, A/S Johnson and the Ambassador met with Charles Higgins, the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) Project Manager for the Nahr al-Barid camp, which was largely destroyed by a three-month battle between Palestinian extremists and the Lebanese security forces in May 2007. Following those events, the Lebanese government announced its intention to begin civilian policing inside the Palestinian camps (something it had not done since 1969) with Nahr Al-Barid as the pilot project. In 2005, the GOL initiated a dialogue process with the Palestinians to address the lack of basic civil rights of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, who are generally not permitted to work, own property or operate businesses.

¶16. (SBU) The USG has provided over half of the funding to rebuild Nahr al-Barid, a substantial portion of emergency humanitarian assistance to the displaced refugees, and INL has pledged to construct a police station in the camp with extensive community policing training for the ISF officers assigned there. Higgins explained that the Palestinians were wary, suspicious and, in many cases, unwilling to be policed by the ISF. Rumors about Lebanese government intentions are rife (e.g., that community policing is geared to turn the Palestinians into informants or that the UN housing construction in the camp is for a planned tourist resort and not for the Palestinians) and divisions within the 17 Palestinian groups within the camp have created a tense situation. The national dialogue process was viewed as a failure by many Palestinians in the camp who rejected their Beirut-based interlocutors with the Lebanese government as unrepresentative of the community.

¶17. (C) The November 26, 2009 resignation of Amb. Khalil Makkawi, Chairman of the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee (LPDC) (accepted by the PM effective January 31, 2010) has left another void in an already deficient process, explained Higgins. In the meantime, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) were erecting barricades around the nearby Baddawi camp where over 10,000 of the refugees displaced from

Nahr al-Barid currently live. The Palestinians, he said, fear that the LAF intends to implement the tight checkpoints in Beddawi that currently exist in Nahr al-Barid. These checkpoints have almost completely stifled commerce within the camp, where unemployment is over 80%. Tensions are high, said Higgins, and it would foolish for the U.S. to build the police station or the ISF to begin policing without prior extensive outreach and dialogue with the community. If ISF policing fails in Nahr al-Barid, he noted, it cannot work in any of the other Palestinian camps. UNDP Chief of Staff Nick Hartman, also present at the meeting, said that the UNDP has fully funded the LPDC, and that PM Hariri has asked that the UN-hired Maya Majzoub, the LPDC head in Sidon, to replace Makkawi. (Note: Her appointment became effective February 11. End note.) Higgins also asserted that UNRWA intended to convene another donor conference for the reconstruction of Nahr al-Barid sometime in mid-year, probably in Beirut.

OTHER MEETINGS

¶18. (SBU) A/S Johnson and the Ambassador also met with Nick Hartman, UNDP Chief of Staff in Lebanon, for an update on a UNDP regional anti-corruption project to which the INL has contributed over \$2.2 million since 2006. A/S Johnson told Hartman that the U.S. seeks to have the UNDP move beyond meetings and would like to see actual anti-corruption mechanisms developed in the Arab countries. A/S Johnson met as well with the INL-funded contractors implementing the Lebanon Police Support Program. He thanked the over 40 assembled U.S. instructors and contractors and over 70 Lebanese staff for their contribution to the success of the INL Lebanon program.

¶19. (U) There was extensive media interest in the visit. Five Lebanese television news programs aired coverage of the ISF graduation ceremony and A/S Johnson had a media pull-aside with Murr Television (MTV). He conducted a long interview with the An-Nahar newspaper which ran on January 14.

¶10. (U) Assistant Secretary Johnson has cleared this cable.
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